

# BRIARPATCH

Volume 30, Number 2

March 2001

\$3.00

## Women in the face of Globalization

GLOBALIZATION



Maquiladoras



Spies



Feminism and Foes





### HAPPY AS A HATTER!

Residents of Medicine Hat, Alberta enjoy natural gas rates about 70 percent lower than the rest of the province and their electricity rates are about 30 percent lower. On top of that they are getting the same \$500 energy-rebate cheques as other Albertans. The city owns its gas and power companies as well as vast gas reserves. Provincial government officials faced with demands for a similar system from consumer groups elsewhere argue that their hands are tied. NAFTA prevents them from setting lower prices on oil or gas for its own citizens than what it charges for exports. Medicine Hat is not exporting and so is not subject to NAFTA rules.

"The reason we're paying higher prices is that people in California are willing to pay higher prices. As a result, there is no relationship between the cost of producing natural gas or electricity and the price charged for it," explained Bill Moore-Kilgannon, an analyst from the left-wing Parkland Institute.

Jim Wachowich, lawyer and spokesperson for the Albert branch of the Consumers Association of Canada, believes the Alberta government could take over some gas reserves and sell the fuel to Albertans through a publicly-owned utility. He claims, "The mechanisms are only limited by the imagination. The province could designate reserves for residential use because, as the actual owner of the fuel, the province could take some as a royalty."

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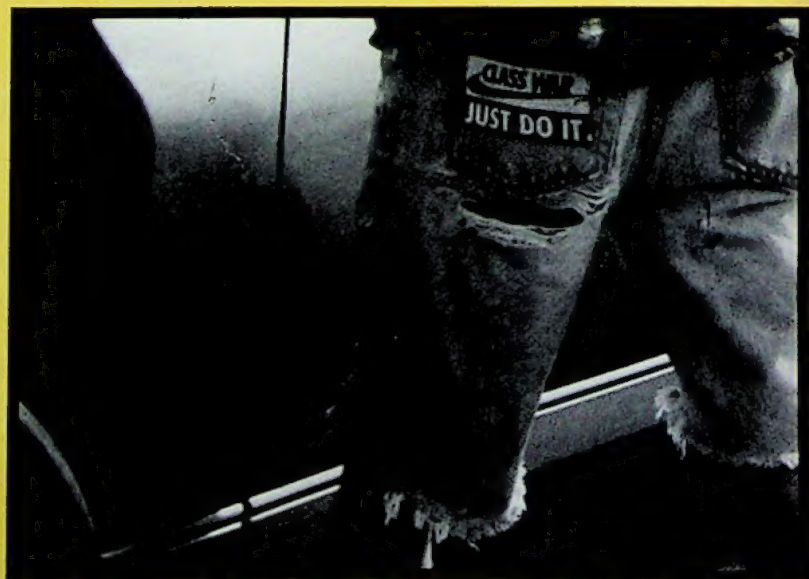
### NIKE CODE OF CONTEMPT

On January 12, state police in Atlixco, Puebla, Mexico in full riot gear attacked 300 workers who were occupying the Kuk Dong International garment factory. Twenty-five workers ended up in the hospital. The work-stoppage was in response to the illegal firing of 20 workers who had complained about low wages (\$30 U.S. for a 45-hour week), rotten food in the cafeteria and the failure of the company to pay the full legally required Christmas bonus.

The striking workers demanded that the company reinstate the fired workers and recognize the union of their choice rather than the union brought in by the company without the worker's consent. This was a clear violation of the right of workers to freedom of association under Mexican law, the Nike code of conduct and collegiate licensing codes of U.S. universities whose products are made in the factory.

Newly-elected President Vincente Fox stated during his campaign and also while visiting Canada in August that he would ensure that the corrupt and illegal practices of the former government and its "official" unions would not be allowed to continue.

The Maquila Solidarity Network / Ethical Trading Action Group is asking for your help to bring justice to these workers. You can get more information at their web-site: [www.maquilasolidarity.org](http://www.maquilasolidarity.org) and you can contact Lic. Vincente Fox Quesada, Presidente de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos at [vincente@fox2000.org.mx](mailto:vincente@fox2000.org.mx).





**Briarpatch** is Saskatchewan's independent alternative newsmagazine committed to building a socialist democratic society. We provide an open forum for disadvantaged peoples and support progressive movements working to change unjust structures and build a genuine political and economic democracy. We support peace, equality, democracy, social justice, Aboriginal self-determination, and the protection of the environment. We oppose the oppression of people on the basis of nation, class, race, gender, ability, and sexual orientation.

# BRIARPATCH

March 2001

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## COVER

According to Us

## OFF THE TOP

by Denise McDonald

Women around the world are organizing, mobilizing and resisting global capitalism, international "free" trade and neo-liberal market-driven agendas that are eroding economic security, social programs and environmental health. This issue of Briarpatch highlights the successes of women struggling against the destruction of nature, culture and community and show that it is possible to make a difference!

Anne McGrath examines the challenges of overcoming differences in race, class, age and ability to build a global women's movement where women work together to resist the tyranny of globalization.

Annette Desmarais works with women who are fighting for the lives and livelihoods of their communities and have succeeded in getting their voices heard in the international arena through the Via Campesina, a global coalition of the world's food producers working together to combat the negative effects of the globalization of agriculture.

Globalization has increased competition in the garment industry which has chosen to increase profits and lower costs by paying workers less than minimum wage, no vacation or overtime pay and often no pay at all! Michelle Beveridge writes about the Maria Elena Cuadra Movement of Working and Unemployed Women of Nicaragua whose "Employment with Dignity" campaign educates the public, government, industry and most importantly, workers in the Free Trade Zones about their human and labour rights. After years of hard work, women organizers in Nicaragua saw the minister of labour adopt a Code of Conduct and reform the laws that govern the Free Trade Zones, setting precedents that can be used by sweatshop workers worldwide.

The struggles facing our sisters in Nicaragua are the same battles we are fighting in Canada. Cara Banks writes an

inspiring story about homeworkers in Toronto who spoke out against gross injustices in the garment industry and also filed a class action suit against large manufacturers and retailers. See you in court!

Laurie Hergott's interviews with young women activists across Canada shows that they are informed and mobilized against the injustices of globalization. Young women stress the importance of looking at the world holistically and the need to work together to create a world they are proud to be a part of.

Jennifer LaFontaine, a Toronto-based community activist, writes about a group of women who are using photography for education, social change and resistance against poverty and violence against women. They will be touring the Prairies during May Day week so watch for them!

Women sustain their families and communities through the provision of basic needs and are stewards of natural resources and bio-diversity. In spite of their tireless contribution, women have limited access to economic and political power and are excluded from participating in mainstream decision making processes and policy development. Economic peril and the vision of a more just and equitable world are prompting women to find their voices through collective action and resist the tyranny of global capitalism. They came in droves for APEC in Vancouver, the WTO in Seattle, the Biotechnology Protocol in Montreal, the World Petroleum Congress in Calgary and the World March of Women 2000. Look out FTAA Summit in Quebec City - here we come! Women are organizing locally, globally and collectively for political, economic and social justice.

*Denise MacDonald resists globalization by buying locally, avoiding multinational corporations, and not creating garbage*



# Resistance through Photography

*Using visual images to tell women's stories in a universally understandable way.*

by Jennifer LaFontaine



According to Us is a diverse group of low income women who use photography to explore issues such as poverty and violence against women, to tell the stories of their communities and as a tool for social change. The group began two years ago with five women from the community who were committed to participate in weekly workshops about photography. The women have learned black and white photography skills such as how to compose creative photographs, use single lens reflex cameras, process negatives and print photographs in the darkroom and curate exhibitions.

According to Us is a component of the Women's program at Central Neighbourhood House, a community based multi-service agency in Toronto. The Women's program strives to include advocacy, community development and education on anti-discriminatory issues. Culturally, the group of women is diverse and there are lesbian as well as straight women. The women all have the common social reality of long-term poverty and various members have faced issues such as homelessness, violence, mental illness and physical disability.

As the facilitator of According to Us, I am committed to making the links between the artist and the community. As a photographer I can enable a process of creating art within the community and use images as tools for resistance. Art is often seen as an individual endeavor, but my mentor was a professor, Deborah Barndt, who has been teaching how photography



**Woman warrior from Chiapas, Mexico. She participated in the Women's World March on October 17th, 2000 in New York City**

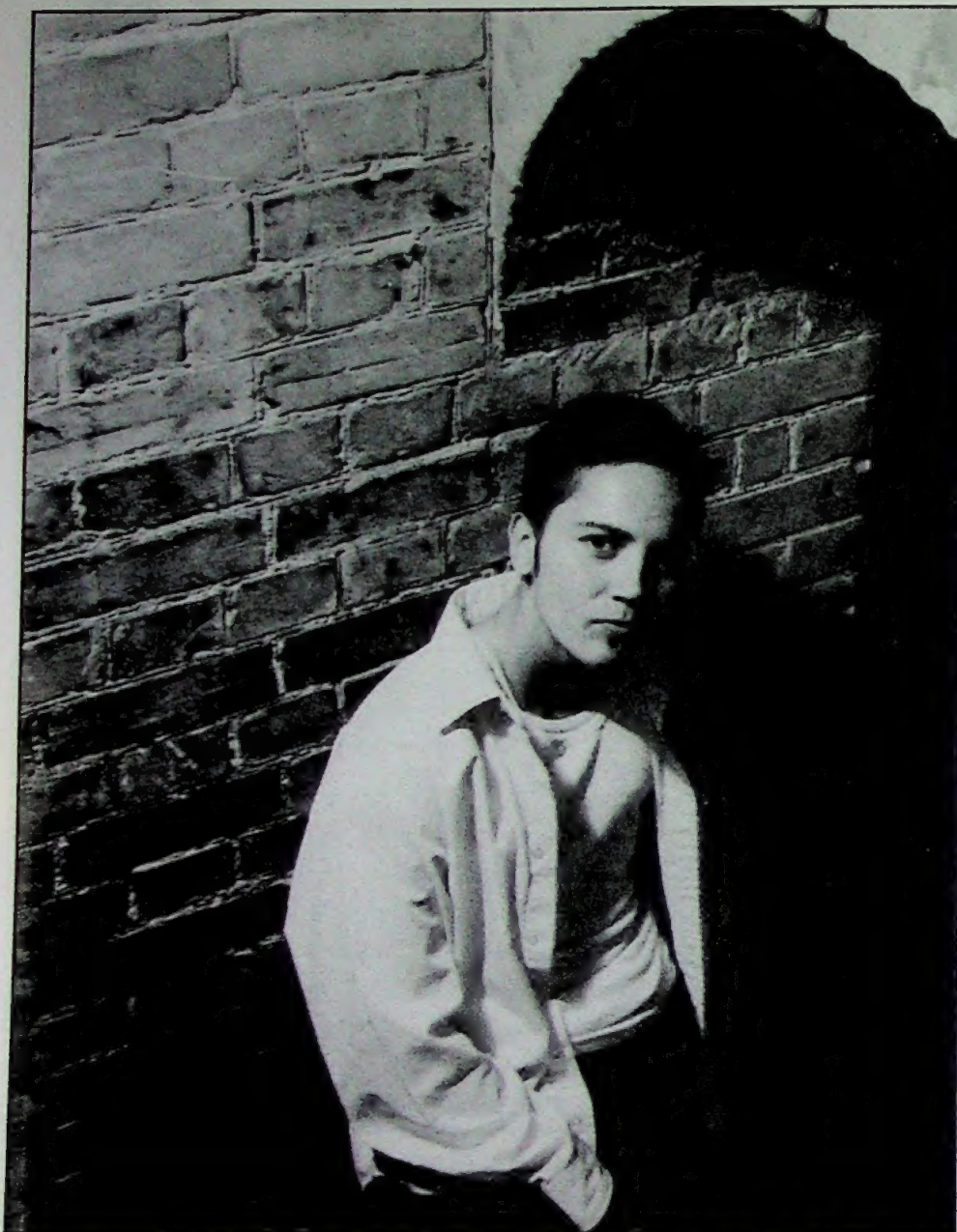
can be used for social justice. I have followed in Deborah Barndt's path, exploring how photography can be used as a tool for education, action and social change.

In According to Us there is a collective power, a strength that comes through learning from each other and creating community art. What remains constant is the women's determination that they continue making their voices heard, documenting the stories and struggles of their lives and the lives of women in their community. Two years has allowed us to dig deeper and to challenge ourselves. Each woman has found her own path to creativity, healing and resistance through art.

For example, when the women started taking photographs it was to document what was going on "out there." No one wanted any photographs of herself. We were preparing an exhibit about violence against women and looking at the connection between violence and issues such as housing, education, media and children. Eventually, they brought in more and more images of their lives. It became much more personal and by the end of the project every woman had either a photo of herself or her child in the exhibit.

I chose to interview the current members of the group for this article because I felt it symbolized why they





*Susan Justin (Stu), designer, artist and drag king.*

began this project to begin with - their voices have not been heard. These women have been marginalized and oppressed, and have been struggling for their whole lives. They have not been given the space to share their experiences and ideas in society at large nor in much of feminist discourse. Although they represent what is theorized about (inclusion and diversity), women in these communities are rarely the ones to write it, to say it or to publish it. The women in *According to Us* are determined to fight back - to have a dialogue that challenges people to see, hear, feel and act - and they are fighting back with their photographs. I remember a colleague saying to me, "These women say it right every time," and I believe it is true.

Here are their voices, telling about the photography projects they have done and about what art as activism means to them. In these first excerpts, the women tell about

why they joined *According to Us*:

Emily: "This group has become very important to me even though I have only been a part of it for a short period of time. I have been a victim of violence many times, and a victim of homelessness, of long-term poverty and so on. I was employed in a project that was working with disenfranchised women around these issues and I saw a lot of women turn their lives around by the creativeness of the work that they were doing. When I had the opportunity to join this group I felt like I was able to take back some of the power that I had lost by becoming unemployed. The combination of using skills around issues that are so central to every woman's life felt like a real opportunity."

Dar: "Well, I love photography and I used to take a lot of pictures, but I could never develop them. I really wanted to learn how to do that. Also, for years my son and I were involved in *VOICE*, which is Violence Overcome in a Creative Ensemble. *VOICE* involved nine members who ranged in age from about nine up to 15. The children wrote their own play and they went out and performed it in libraries and schools. It was geared towards children who either witnessed domestic violence or were victims themselves of abuse. Anyway, in the photography I saw a way for me to still fight against the

violence but in a very constructive way and to educate people - the public in general. I think it is really important to have this kind of experience behind me so that someday I can pass it on to other women."

Donna: "I am on a committee in the east end of the city and we do forums and things like that on violence against women. I thought, 'what better way but to explore violence against women and photography together,' because I enjoy them both. I wanted to know more about what was going on because I know that violence against women is such a big, big topic. It would also help me with the forums at South Riverdale Violence Against Women and Children Coalition."

#### **Violence against Women**

In 1999, the group produced the exhibit about vio-



lence against women. Three members, who have been involved in According to Us since the beginning, discuss their favorite moment from their first exhibit:

Rolanda: "CUPE 4400 is our union and we are support staff for education. The Harris government was trying to eliminate our jobs and we were there to fight. We won, for a year. Now we might strike again this year. We don't know. It's unending and it isn't right. I was frozen to death on strike but I was just right there in front taking pictures. It was like someone was pulling me. Get that picture. It was really right from my heart that I wanted to do this. It was exciting, the feeling. Oh my God, I did something really good for myself."

Donna: "I took a picture in the first exhibit of a petition being signed for the K-courts to be in other courts. The K-court is a support program at the courthouse for women who have been victims of violence. Someone supports them through the court process, so those women who are testifying about the violence are not alone. This program was only in one courthouse. Because of the petition the K-courts did open up to at least one other courthouse."

Darlene: "I was touched by the homelessness issue of our first exhibit. There was a mock funeral for the homeless and we took photos of that. It was a mock funeral but it's true, you know, the homeless are dying all the time out there in the streets and it's not helping the fact that Mike Harris has stopped building affordable housing. It's outrageous. I mean, every time you turn around somebody is dead or dying or needing a hospital that is already closed down."

The World March of Women 2000 was an international campaign involving women from over 130 countries in marches, demonstrations and many local events between March and October 2000. Women were mobilizing for the eradication of poverty and the elimination of violence against women.

## Portraits of Resistance

According to Us created a photography exhibit, "Portraits of Resistance: Celebrating Women's Lives," which was displayed at the March of Women showcase at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto. Since then the exhibition continues to travel throughout the community, to the National March in Ottawa and to local actions and events. The exhibit profiles a diverse group of women, diverse in who they are and what they do. We tell about each woman and she tells of a woman who inspires her, passing on women's stories. The women we chose are neither the most famous nor the highest profile women in Canada. They are women in our communities who challenge our ideas, push our boundaries, make us laugh and make our hearts sing. The women in According to Us went on 16

photo shoots and from each woman we learned new things, shot rolls and rolls of film and were truly inspired. The women discuss why they felt this exhibit was powerful to them:

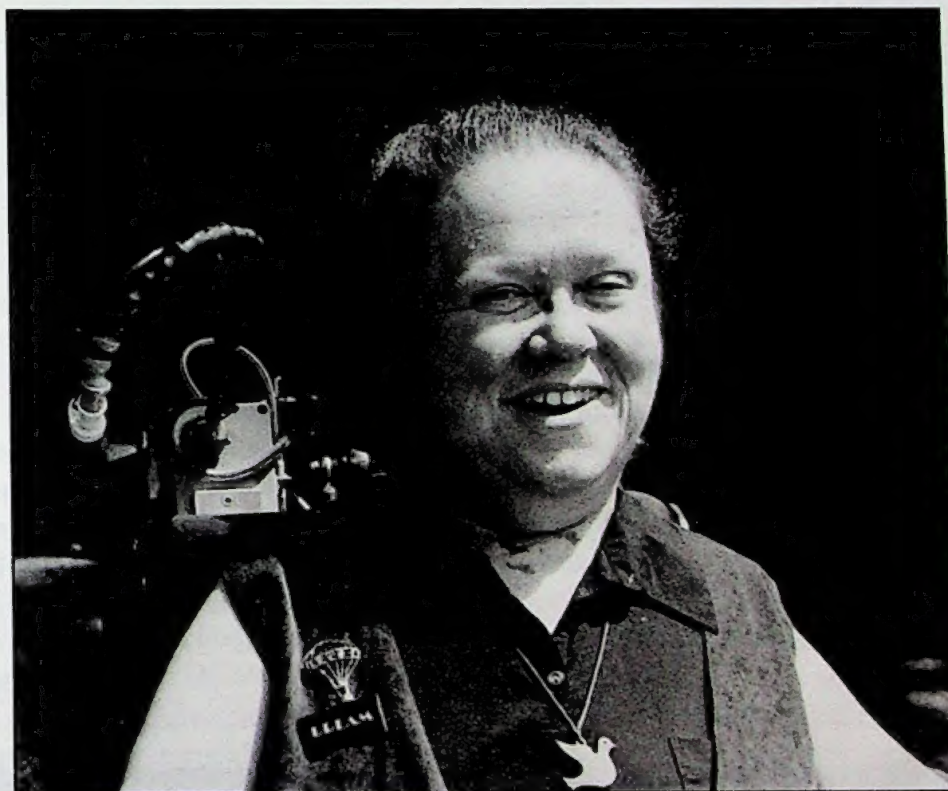
Dar: "It felt good for me to do the portraits because these are women like us. They weren't anybody on the TV that most people would know just by name-dropping. They are like us. They are hard working women trying to make a change in society."

Emily: "Hearing their stories about the struggles they've been through to be where they are. It was just incredible seeing how amazingly beautiful all these women are. We heard about it and saw it and photographed it."

Donna: "I was really touched by taking photos of Judith Snow, a quadrapalegic advocate and international speaker. I was amazed at how she can just do what she does and how she survives. I mean she practically can't do anything except speak for herself, and breath. The power she has - she goes all over the place."

Rolanda: "All it takes is her voice. To encourage people. To make a change."

Maureen: "The photo shoots were great. I had never done portraits before and I enjoyed talking to the women,



**Judith Snow is an inventor, international educator and rights advocate.**



taking photos and learning camera skills. My favorite photo shoot was with Susan Justin, a drag king. We just went to town on that one. I think I shot 96 shots. It was a good experience because I knew drag kings were out there, I just wasn't really sure about it. I never knew anyone who was a drag king before. We talked about what was going on in my life. Ideas that she experienced meshed with what has been going on with me. It was really satisfying."

Emily: "I think the photo shoot that surprised me the most was the interview that we did with Bev Smith, the National Women's Basketball coach, because I have never been a sports fan of any kind. I never thought about how little women in sport were recognized. It's like the way women are viewed in everything they do. She really explained how she has fought against that. I always thought 'well, women in sports must be doing alright, they've made the grade.' But they haven't. It is a struggle."

### March of Women

Women in According to Us also attended and documented the National March of Women at Parliament Hill in Ottawa on October 15, 2000 and the International March at the United Nations in New York City on October 17, 2000. Here they reflect on their experiences:

Donna: "I loved the feeling of everyone getting together and being like one. It feels like you have more power out there. The feeling of power can be really nice. We're out there. We're doing something for a good cause."

Rolanda: "I remember when Jen, According to Us facilitator, and I were standing on the wall and taking pictures of the whole march on Parliament Hill. I felt like they were all family to me! Like a family reunion or something. It felt so good. Women came so far to come to one place together and fight."

Emily: "I stood on the sideline. I was up on a little hill waiting for the march to come around and when I saw that line it just went on and on and on. All these women came and I started crying. It is so moving and you know the struggle that everyone had to make to be there. I cried and cried, and took pictures and cried."

Dar: "The highlight for me, as a Metis woman, was to see Terri Brown leading the march in Ottawa. She is the first aboriginal woman to be president of NAC. I felt so good to see her leading that march. I didn't even realize it was her until I took about three pictures of this woman. I found her to be so dynamic."

Rolanda: "I felt the same way at the march in Ottawa when I saw Filipina women coming - older ladies with a banner that was in our language. They talked to me in my language. Seeing Filipina women like me there, I felt like I was floating. I was amazed."

### Art and Activism

Finally, the women give their last words on art and activism. They express why they think photography is an effective strategy for education and social action, and what it means for them to be involved:

Emily: "When we showed the exhibit in Ottawa at the March of Women people were just knocked out. Some people stood there for an hour reading and looking. They just seemed to be so impacted by being in the march and then seeing photos of women activists and women in the community. People seemed to make the connections. It really opens you up in so many ways to see that the work you've done has such impact. I couldn't believe that they were so moved by it. I think that is why this kind of approach we've taken here is so powerful, because it comes from such a deep, strong place. It hasn't been heard. And when you see

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*Solidarity -- Zainab, Women of the Four Directions*

again. This kind of strategy for looking at what is happening in the community is energizing. You get very tired of fighting the same fight all the time. When we look at tactics like these for bringing the issues out into the community, it is revitalizing."

Maureen: "It is a wonderful group to work with. Not everybody sees things in the same way. One person looks at it this way and another does it

it the impact is very powerful."

Rolanda: "The thing with the picture is, whether it is a bad or good image, it's there. Without saying a word you see it right there. And children will understand a picture better than reading."

Emily: "You're right, you know, and it doesn't depend on your language. It can go across language differences and countries."

Donna: "And illiterate people will understand because not all people here know how to read and pictures say so much."

Dar: "People like looking at photographs better than reading, really. A picture can tell so much more than words. It can catch the certain body language, the facial expression. The impact that it has on me is that it makes me feel that I've done something solid for the community when I see the pictures that I have either shot myself or helped to develop. And to know that the women in the group with me have contributed in the same way. We are all in this together and I think that is where our bonding is coming from."

Emily: "I think the thing for me is that we all fought in the '60s and now here we are again. It's like they smashed the house down and we have to build all over

that way and eventually we build a big picture. It is like a jigsaw puzzle. Everyone has their piece and we see how it fits in and when it does, it fits together great."

Through photography women have been able to express issues about their social reality and work for social change in ways that they have not done before. This skill has enabled them to address problems such as poverty and violence against women within their communities in an accessible and creative way. A wider audience has heard their voices, from the women in their communities who are struggling with the same issues, to the thousands of women from across Canada at the World March of Women in Ottawa.

The effect is twofold: not only are the women in the group empowered by addressing issues that are important to them, but they deal with it in a way that helps others in their community as well. As one woman said, "I would like to have my photographs displayed so that other people realize that everyone has something to say." Through photography their voices are being heard.

*Jennifer LaFontaine is a community artist and activist who enjoys using photography as a tool for social change.*



If you are a

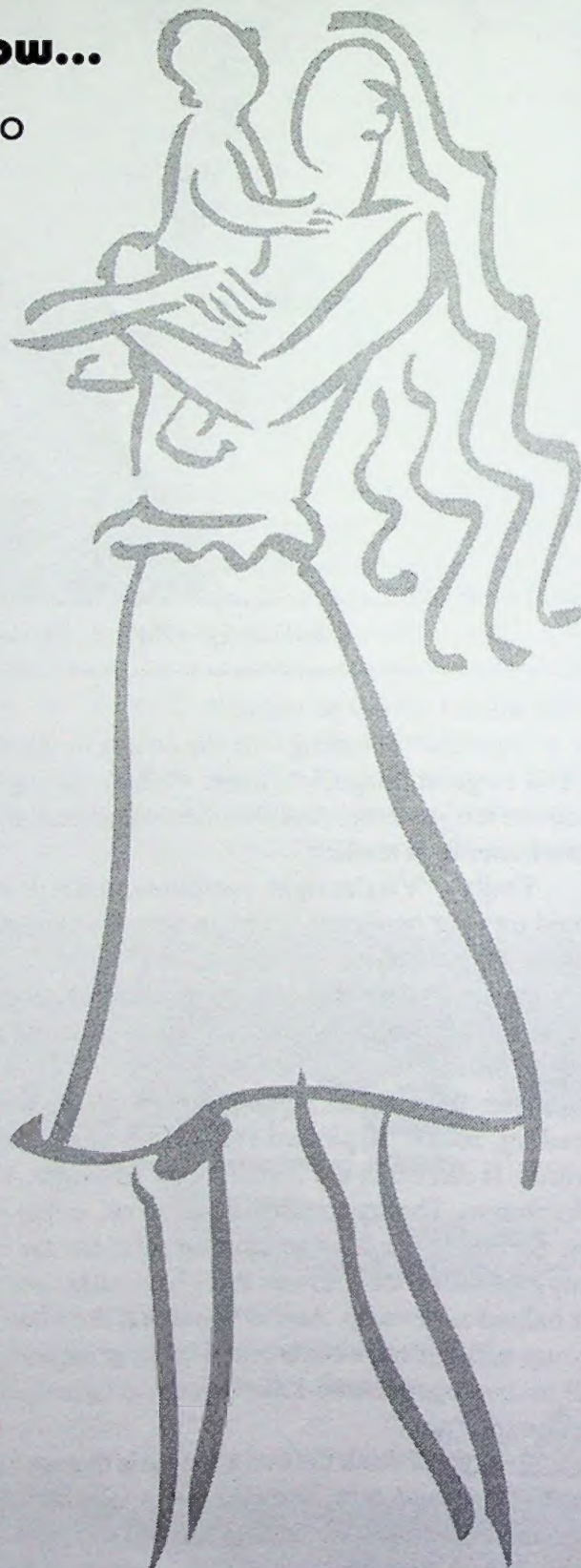
# mother-to-be

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- In every pregnancy, there is a period of time when a woman is absent from work for health-related reasons.
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# CLOTHING INDUSTRY ON TRIAL

GLOBALIZATION



*Homeworkers in Canada are exposing the dirty laundry of the manufacturers by challenging their schemes to avoid accountability.*

by Cara Banks

Fan Jin Lian worked for Eliz World, a clothing factory, for over a year when it suddenly closed its doors.

Like many other immigrants to Canada, she sewed garments for the company out of her home on her own equipment. She received very low piece rates and worked under great pressure to meet high production demands. "I worked very hard to do the work I was hired to do. I sewed as much as seven days a week and up to 15 hours a day to meet their deadlines," says Jin Lian.

According to the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE), these working conditions are not abnormal in the homeworking industry. Reports published in 1992 and 1999, commissioned from the University of Toronto, show that employers of homeworkers in Ontario regularly violate provincial laws regarding minimum wage, overtime pay and vacation pay. "The homeworkers are at the bottom of an apparel pyramid in which the lower down you are, the less money you get. The structure of the garment industry is evolving so that retailers are at the top of the pyramid, contracting work to a contractor to assemble the garments. The contractor subcontracts to a small factory where the cutting and some sewing is done. The small factory will in turn subcontract sewing to homeworkers. Contractors and subcontractors recruit, hire and pay the workers whose piece rates often fall below minimum wage," says Alexandra Dagg of UNITE.

When Eliz World closed down they owed Fan Jin Lian about \$5000 in back wages. With the help of the Homeworkers Association of UNITE's Ontario Council, she is now suing the five clothing retailers, manufacturers and contractors. In fact, a class action claim was launched

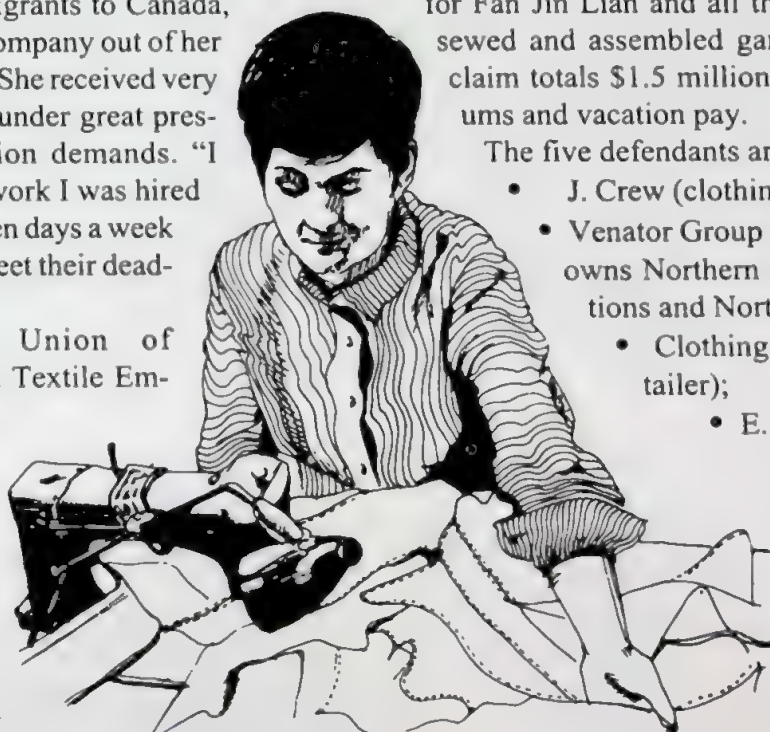
on behalf of all the garment workers who did piecework for Eliz World. The claim is for \$500,000 in back wages for Fan Jin Lian and all the other class members who sewed and assembled garments for Eliz World. The claim totals \$1.5 million for wages, overtime premiums and vacation pay.

The five defendants are:

- J. Crew (clothing manufacturer and retailer);
- Venator Group Canada Inc. (the retailer who owns Northern Traditions, Northern Reflections and Northern Elements);
- Clothing for Modern Times Ltd. (retailer);
- E. Knitted Garment Inc. (manufacturer); and
- Eliz World Inc. (the contractor, who has closed its offices and factories and disconnected its phones).

UNITE's argument is that all the companies in the production process should be held liable for wages. J. Crew denies any responsibility at all, arguing that the legal tests for joint liability do not apply to this kind of business arrangement. They have stated that they didn't even know they were doing business in Canada. This kind of business arrangement is becoming increasingly common under corporate globalization, where transnational companies search for the cheapest possible locales to produce their products. This may mean different parts of one piece of clothing may be sewed under sweatshop conditions in Canada, other parts may be assembled in Hong Kong and still others in any number of countries.

"Over the years retailers have gained enormous power to determine the price of clothing, the price of production and the turnaround times. In this case, we are alleging that J.Crew, Venator Group and Costa Blanca were the controlling minds in the entire chain of production of their clothes. They determined the price paid to contractors and





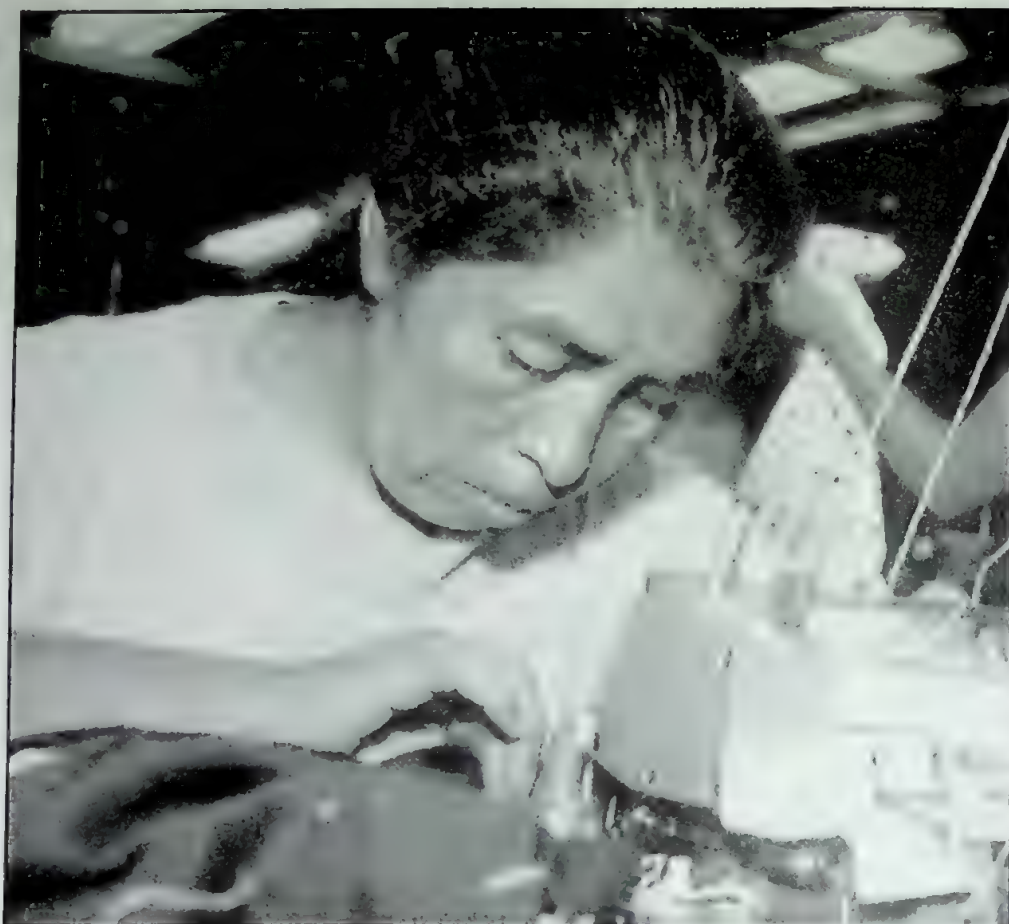
subcontractors and when production had to be completed. We're alleging that their prices are so low and production deadlines so tight that the plaintiff, who was paid by the piece rate, sometimes did not earn minimum wage as required under the Employment Standards Act," says Dagg.

A successful class action suit against these giant retailers would send the message that they can no longer insulate themselves from the employees at the bottom of the pyramid. Targeting the large manufacturers and retailers is necessary in an industry where subcontractors regularly go out of business. As Jonathan Eaton from UNITE says, "We need to assert accountability on the industry. This industry is a mess."

"The fact is, this industry has had nearly a decade to clean up its act and start treating workers fairly. But it seems that for many firms in the industry the only way to persuade them is to hit them where it counts - in the courts and in their pocket-books," says Dagg.

Regardless of the court's decision, UNITE is happy to have donated its lawyer's time to the case. The class action suit is giving women in very vulnerable positions in society access to the legal system. Dagg adds, "When we talk about homeworkers, we're talking about some of the hardest working, most poorly paid women in our society. Many of them are immigrants who feel powerless in a new country. I'm hoping this claim will help not only the women involved, but all homeworkers across Canada."

*Cara Banks is disgusted by the exploitation of homeworkers.*



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# Voices of our Future



## *Young women speak out on what is engaging and mobilizing them.*

by Laurie Hergott

When I first began to write this article I realized that what has engaged me as a young woman would be different than other young women. So I decided to interview young women activists across the country to get a broader glimpse into this aspect of our activism. The following is just a brief summary of some key themes.

I was granted the opportunity to share with them their individual stories of "engagement" and the personal process each had gone through. Some shared memories from childhood, other told stories from travelling. Some were unable to put their finger on the exact reason, it was just something they knew they had to do. Although they each had unique experiences, general themes were woven throughout.

Awareness of the issues tended to lead to a personal commitment to educate themselves more and more until they reached the point where "Ignorance is bliss. Once you know more it's hard to go back." For many it was finding an outlet or having exposure to other active people that empowered them and helped them recognize that things not only need to be done, but they can be done. "In a time when we are surrounded by poverty, injustice, discrimination and alienation there are people who are willing to fight for something real."

For some, experiencing oppression themselves added fuel to the fire. "It digs at you after awhile - we don't analyze it when we're young, we just survive, but slowly we recognize it as oppression and that it is systematic and happens to other people as well - and this isn't right."

A foundation of injustice personally witnessed or experienced existed. The move to become actively engaged however, does not arise only to resist what you do not like. It also comes from the desire to be part of creating something new - a future that you want to be a part of. "There is so much injustice in the world. Injustice between humans and injustice to all the other species of life that we share

Earth with. For a long time I was awfully good at seeing, defining and complaining about a variety of issues. At one point it felt empty to be complaining all the time, or simply dreaming while I trudged along in the mire of the status quo."

But the barriers to being an activist do not just crumble once you decide to become engaged. Being an activist is not an easy job, especially for youth. Often your ideas are brushed off due to your age or it is seen as simply "a phase" you are going through.

Several noted that even today, in their twenties, they feel removed from mainstream society due to this new worldview they have adopted. Hanging out with friends and acquaintances that didn't share this same vision became harder. "The average person in the main-

stream thinks I'm wacko. But if you examine it, what they think is weird is that I actually give a shit about people and the Earth."

This engagement has not only changed their lifestyle, but also how others view them and how they view themselves. "I've come to live more and more what I speak and realize that it's not taking away from my quality of life. I've listened to my morals and acted on them and I am stronger for it."

They all felt that they really question what they want or the ways they consume. The decision to take responsibility for one's own actions has been empowering, even if it means getting weird

looks when you ask for your take-out food in the container you brought from home.

Many expressed that once you are more actively living to support your ideals and beliefs, it begins to define you. This can be both positive and negative. Some will respect you for living your convictions, yet others will feel threatened by it and simply pigeon-hole you into a stereotype that they can either brush off or make digs at. "I am treated with more respect by some, but others put me in the 'hippy-tree-hugger' box because they are afraid of the real issues it represents."





Others slot them in a different box. "Some people tend to create a martyr out of me. Putting people on pedestals isn't healthy and it takes responsibility away from others. I'm just doing my part."

So what are the issues that are mobilizing young women these days? What movements are they aligning themselves with? Most felt it was hard to pinpoint a movement which they consider themselves working in. "It becomes more and more evident that economic, social and environmental variables are woven together very tightly. The more I learn, the more I realize that you can't look at any one of these in a vacuum."

"I don't feel like I need to be involved in an organization focused on women to work on women's issues. All issues involve women's issues, minority issues, labour issues, etc. We need to look at it in a holistic manner through the entire social change movement in order to actually affect true social change."

Everyone interviewed expressed the importance of working together so that learning, understanding and respecting others' perspectives may develop in order to build true solidarity. Many currently work in coalitions and support various campaigns in an attempt to actively build bridges. "A problem in social movements is that they often get caught up in their own agenda and a competition and struggle occurs between groups."

Frustrations and pet peeves from various elements which exist in activist movements were expressed. "Youth tokenism is an issue. Some movements have a 'youth voice' not because they sincerely want your input, but to be po-

litically correct. As long as you agree with what they say it is fine, but if you don't your input is easily dismissed."

"There are still so many people, even within the movement, who are limiting the strength of young women without even realizing it. There are still so many times where I am reminded that I'm a woman or that I'm young. People don't pay enough attention to what they say or how they're oppressing others."

"It can sometimes be tough to be a young woman in groups. I'm sad to say that for all of our progressive thought, men still have a tendency to take over. At the same time, I'm encouraged by the willingness of both women and men to call this and give it attention. Things are changing but we haven't shaken patriarchy yet."

"If a progressive organization ignores class, race, age or the environment in their analysis, then it is not *truly* a progressive organization. Progressivity is much more than being cutting edge in your area. It should mean completely rejecting oppression of any kind and embracing all aspects of creating the most just and equitable world possible. If this means it's hard for people to work together, then let's acknowledge why and deal with it. These barriers will never come down until we ourselves are willing to address and challenge our own discriminating tendencies."

If young women are mobilizing across sectors in their activism, how are they organizing within their groups? With what values and principles? How are decisions being made? From the discussions it was apparent that it depended on what people were organizing and with whom. Equality, respecting diversity, full participation, bottom-up organ-

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izing, creating space for everyone to contribute and develop skills, non-verbal communication and the sharing of roles were common topics.

"We are trying not to have a hierarchy of people - we share roles so everyone can develop skills and we can find where and what skills lie in the group. We are really learning. We try to create an inclusive atmosphere which helps keep everyone interested and provides the chance to shine and explore their qualities."

The concept of organizing via collectives also arose. "With more and more individuals becoming active and not necessarily wearing the hat of an organization or aligning themselves with particular movements, collectives are a viable way to work on issues and ensure the inclusion of everyone without having to worry about representation or membership."

Developing structures that reflect the principles we believe in, especially equality, was seen as a vital part of organizing. "From my experience majority rule pits people against each other. It's not truly democratic, it silences a minority. This all spreads seeds of discontent."

It is very interesting to note that every young woman interviewed had experience using more than one method of decision-making and that they are discovering the process they prefer regardless of what mainstream organizations and movements are using.

Consensus is significant to many in their work. "We use informal consensus. I just can't imagine making a decision any other way. The minority voice is important and it gives us ownership and responsibility to the group."

"One needs to respect the process - you can't just push issues through. You have to actually listen and respect the group. It opens your mind."

"We normally don't take enough time to make decisions. We rush in hastily and don't make the best long-term decisions that we could have."

"Once people apply the concept of group mind versus individual agenda and actually remove their ego from the process, consensus speeds up and effective decisions can be made. It has an ability that majority rule never will - the potential to cooperate and work equally."

There is another side to being active and organized: finding the balance between energy and exhaustion. Having to juggle school, jobs and activism, few youth get the chance to devote as much time as they would like. But there isn't a lack of commitment and passion. Many have made activism their focus in addition to meeting other obligations. This results in an often overlooked issue - youth burnout. "I think burnout is a huge issue. We're fighting a huge machine and there is lots of resistance to resistance."



photo: Elaine Briere

"Young people are under a lot of pressure to wear a multitude of hats and wear them all well."

"It's hard to say no. There is a stigma attached to it. If you say no, you're perceived as 'you don't care.' We feel we *have* to prove ourselves."

So what keeps these young women activists going? "A need to live with integrity. I cannot imagine a life that didn't include creating what I believe in."

"I always believed that if you're not part of the solution, then you are part of the problem."

"I don't want to conform to society but I do want to work in a way that society is most positively affected by me."

"People inspire me - ordinary people doing things they believe in."

*Laurie Hergott is a young community activist and thanks all interviewed. Kerri Klein, Audra Kruegar, Tracey Mitchell, Erica Sherwood, Amber Robson, Karen Gorecki, Natasha Goudar, Rosa Kossick, Brieanne Altrogge and Stacy Barter shared their thoughts for this article.*





# Employment with Dignity Campaign

*How the Maria Elena Cuadra won major improvements for women working in Nicaragua's Free Trade Zone factories (maquiladoras).*

by Michelle Beveridge

**F**our years of hard work and frustration eventually paid off for the Maria Elena Cuadra (MEC) Movement of Working and Unemployed Women of Nicaragua. In February 1998, 25 companies from the maquiladora industry operating at Las Mercedes Zona Franca

(free trade zone) of Nicaragua signed a Ministerial Accord to adopt the Code of Ethics. The maquiladora companies agreed to guarantee and maintain respect for human and labour rights.

From the moment the free trade zone was established in Nicaragua in 1990, women maquila workers have endured physical and psychological violence. Due to legislative reforms that guaranteed protection for the maquiladora companies, there were serious violations of the country's labour code. Pregnant women were routinely fired and severance and overtime pay was frequently not paid.

## Women of the Maquiladoras

Since 1994 the MEC has worked on labour issues and

Managua, 2 February 1998.  
Honourable Dr. Wilfredo Navarro  
Minister of Labour, Nicaragua.

Dear Sir:

Hereby we wish to inform you that we have carefully studied the Ministerial Accord proposed in relation to work in the Free Trade Zones of Nicaragua, issued on the 23 of January.

We have decided, in a voluntary fashion, to adhere to such Ministerial Resolution because we share the criteria and consider that it will help to improve and harmonize relations between workers and employers.

Likewise, we wish to express our commitment to fulfill perfectly what is expressed in the cited document issued by the Minister of Labour.

Signed,  
the Free Trade Zones companies

human rights for women workers in Nicaragua's free trade zones. Given that 85 percent of the country's 15,000 maquila workers were women, the maquiladoras became a logical place for the MEC to be active. Most of the workers were between the ages of 15 and 28. Forty-eight per-

cent were single mothers with an average of four to five children. Most had low levels of education with limited technical skills. Ninety percent had finished grade eight or less, while ten percent had either technical or university degrees.

Work in the maquiladoras is hard. Prior to the Ministerial Accord long working hours with obligatory overtime was the rule. Women faced sexual harassment, physical violence, lack of union protection and lack of health and safety regulations. Some of the work-related health problems documented by the MEC included arthritis, respiratory infections, wrist pain, shoulder and back pain, stress, allergies and irritations due to the dust from the fabrics, muscular and mental fatigue as well as problems of



the hands and eyes due to repetitive work.

While gathering information on life in the free trade zone the MEC would ask the women why they put up with their situation? For the most part the women felt alone and at the mercy of their employers: "Dignity we have, but the majority of us are single mothers with four or five children and with fear of losing our job. Just imagine a woman who works at Baron and she is 40 years old, single, and has to provide for her family. She has to put up with it because another company is not going to hire her. Baron is the only company that hires you if you are older than 35. In other companies they only hire women between the ages of 18 and 23. The foreign owners say that a woman older than 25 does not produce as much as a younger one."

### The campaign is launched

The MEC launched the "Employment With Dignity" campaign in December of 1996 following a meeting of the Central American Network of Women in Solidarity with Women Maquila Workers (composed of women's organizations from Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador).

The MEC campaign aspired to change public, government and industry opinions on the issues of human rights in the Free Trade Zones in Nicaragua. With financial support from OXFAM-Canada, CoDevelopment Canada and others, the MEC began by improving some of its member's negotiation skills. Then a series of workshops held with the maquila workers took the campaign inside the Free Trade Zones. Workers became educated on issues relating to human rights, labour rights, gender and self-esteem.

One of the first barriers the MEC had to overcome lay with the maquila workers themselves. Sixty-five percent of the women workers had no idea what their rights were. The MEC decided that education and information must be a priority for the campaign. Next, a group of MEC women drew up a Code of Ethics designed to protect the rights of workers. This code was then printed and distributed to all the maquila workers. Copies were also sent to the National Assembly and free trade zone employers. A round of meetings then followed between representatives of the MEC, the Nicaraguan government, National Assembly members and company officials. This resulted in a process of negotiations with the Minister of Labour and the employers.

Support for the Code of Ethics grew as a petition drive resulted in 30,000 signatures being collected. At a public ceremony the petition was delivered to the Ministry of Labour, zone officials and the Catholic church. The ceremony was followed by a forum and debate on human rights in the free trade zones. Soon after, the Minister of Labour

drafted a Ministerial Accord based on the MEC's code of conduct.

The Accord was signed on February 1st, 1998 in the presence of 500 women workers. The next day all the maquiladora companies signed on to the Accord. The MEC proceeded to distribute copies to all maquila workers. The hard work of the women organizers and MEC trainees had been publicly validated.

The Minister of Labour Accord established:

→ an end to discrimination against women workers based on pregnancy, race, religion, age, disability and sexual preference;

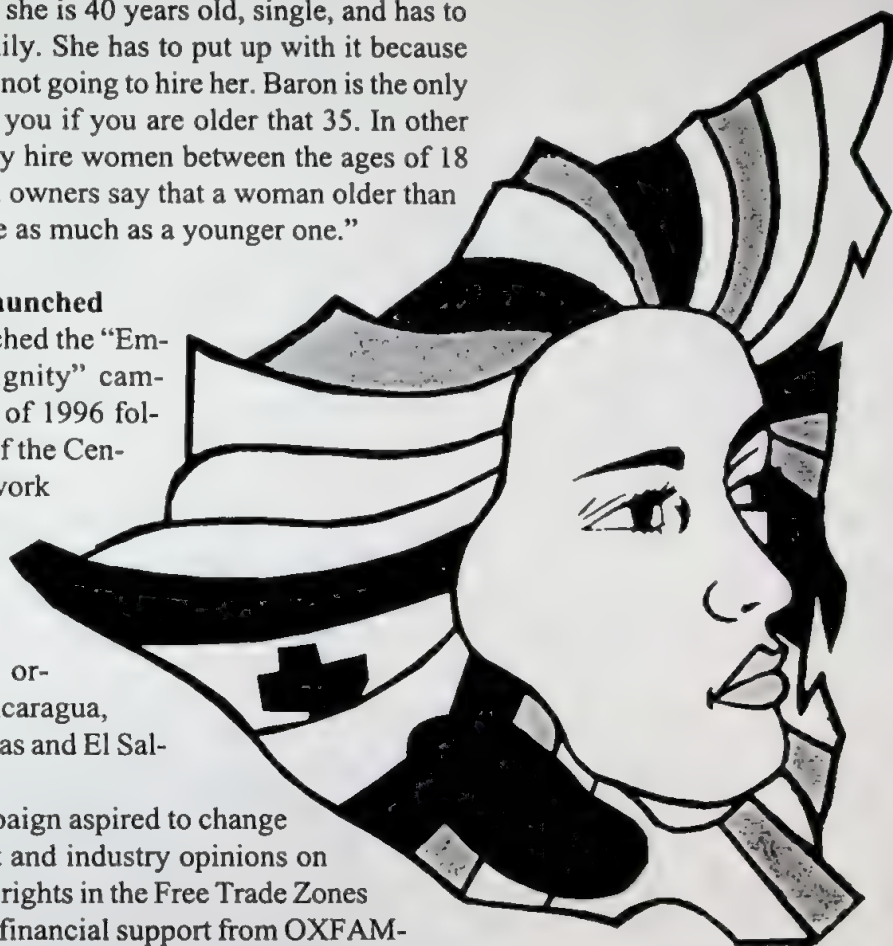
→ that women work-

ers be treated with respect and dignity and that no worker suffer any type of physical, psychological, verbal or sexual violence;

→ a safe work environment to prevent accidents and injuries; and

→ a guarantee that workers receive the legal wage for overtime.

The Accord also allowed workers to organize in all ways legally permissible (and not just those permissible under labour law). It permitted the negotiation of collective agreements and banned child labour under 14 years of age. The MEC initiative led to improvements in four different areas of human rights: economic rights (right to a livelihood), labour rights (right to organize), individual rights (freedom from violence and harassment), and political rights (foreign companies must respect national laws).



*The logo of the Maria Elena Cuadra organization*



Maquiladoras are a global phenomena. Most free trade zone workers are young women who experience similar violations of their rights as did the women in Nicaragua's Zona Franca. The MEC campaign helped return to the workers some dignity and respect that years of abuse had stripped away. The success of the MEC campaign has also proven to be an inspiration elsewhere in the Americas. Central America Network members in other countries are now considering employing similar tactics in their struggles for justice for women workers.

#### A new vision

The campaign slogan, "Employment with Dignity," reflects a new long-term vision, based on the needs of women at the grassroots who wanted their most pressing problems addressed without threatening their livelihoods. By targeting more than the employers, the initiative was broader than the traditional approach of Nicaraguan unions. Because the campaign included training in gender and human rights, many workers felt it helped them as women and as workers. The MEC approach offered improvements in working conditions and benefits while broadening workers' vision in terms of gender.

The success of this campaign encouraged the MEC to launch a second campaign. Using similar strategies, on

November 16, 1999 the MEC succeeded in securing reforms to the Free Trade Zone Law. Many of these reforms have to do with guaranteeing health and safety. In the words of the President of the National Assembly, "This is the first time in the history of the Nicaraguan Parliament that the very group to benefit from a law is the one that proposed it."

In its arduous quest to improve the working conditions for the maquila workers the MEC has recently launched a third campaign. This one seeks to amend and reform the country's labour code. Although the changes in legislation represent a tremendous step forward, the MEC's struggle to improve the working conditions in the maquiladoras is not yet complete. Until the day that government laws and accords are found to be fair, adhered to and adequately enforced, the work for basic human rights must and will continue.

*Michelle Beveridge works for OXFAM-Canada. They are presently involved in a No Sweat Campaign in partnership with the Maquila Solidarity Network, Students Against Sweatshops - Canada, the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees, and the Canadian Labour Congress. For more information or to get involved in this campaign call (306) 242-4097 or e-mail [sask@oxfam.ca](mailto:sask@oxfam.ca).*

## Women's work-it's still not done

- Fifty per cent of single women over 65 live in poverty.
- Forty per cent of families headed by women live in poverty.

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# The Vía Campesina

## *Building alternatives to the globalization of agriculture.*

by Annette Desmarais



During recent years the rural landscape has been fundamentally altered as a result of further industrialization and economic liberalization of the agriculture sector. Due to implementation of regional trade agreements and the World Trade Organization (WTO), national governments are redefining their agricultural policies to facilitate integration into an international market-driven economy. Existing agricultural and marketing structures are being dismantled while new agrarian laws aimed at restructuring land tenure, land use and marketing systems are being put in place all in efforts to increase production for export and to liberalize the agricultural sector. These laws emphasize the "modernization" or creation of a more "market responsive" and "dynamic" agricultural sector.

As the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) drew to a close with the signing of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture, many of us wondered how peasants and small farmers would respond to the dramatic changes taking place in the countryside. Many claimed that farmers and peasants could not possibly have the organizational capacity to approach the WTO, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) - the institutions that were increasingly responsible for determining agricultural and food policies.

It seemed unimaginable at the time that Mexican or Indonesian peasants could have anything in common with Canadian, French or American farmers. After all, the globalization of a modernized and industrialized model of agriculture aims to keep all farmers and peasants in fierce competition with one another. Yet, a much closer look at what is actually happening in the countryside clearly demonstrates that we had seriously underestimated the extent of current peasant activism.

Granted, in the early stages of the GATT Uruguay Round, peasants and farmers did not march together in Punta del Este. However, during the last stages of the Uruguay Round over 5,000 farmers including European, Canadian, American, Indian, Japanese and Latin American

producers did march together on the GATT in Geneva. A year later in May 1993, farm and peasant leaders from around the world gathered together in Mons, Belgium under the banner of a newly emerging global peasant movement, the Vía Campesina.

The Vía Campesina emerged as a direct response to the fact that the concerns of people who actually work the land and produce the world's food were completely excluded in the GATT negotiations on agriculture. The Vía Campesina is a global movement that brings together organizations of peasants, small and medium-sized farmers, rural women, farm workers and indigenous agrarian communities in Asia, the Americas and Europe. Africa is in the process of integration. It is the only international movement of its kind - it is autonomous, pluralist and independent of any political, economic or other type of affiliation.

The social and political significance of the Vía Campesina cannot be underestimated. Since its formation the Vía Campesina has experienced rapid expansion and now it is perhaps the largest and most significant agricultural social movement in the world. Economic liberalization in the agriculture sector has spurred farm and peasant leaders in the North and South to mobilize far beyond national borders. Indeed, progressive farm and peasant organizations have "transnationalized" and are carving new spaces for negotiation. Perhaps more importantly, the Vía Campesina is succeeding in balancing the diverse interests of its membership as it openly deals with issues such as gender, race, class and north/south relations that could potentially cause divisions.

Women are at the heart of the Vía Campesina. This is clearly reflected in the following excerpt from the Vía Campesina's Position Paper on Gender:

"The global neo-liberal economic agenda is designed to enhance corporate profit and concentrate power without regard for the destruction of nature, culture, community or the well-being of people. The impact of these changes are most acute in rural areas where the brutal exploitation of the environment and the people of the land is an immediate daily experience for millions. Women experience the



impact of these changes in different ways than their male counterparts because of their history, roles and relationships. Hence, it is fitting and necessary to articulate a gender analysis in order to shape inclusive, just and viable long-term solutions.

The predominant current economic goal of increasing the production of saleable items assigns more value to industrial production than reproduction, manufacturing than nurturing, profits than people. This devalues the reproductive, regenerative forces both of the natural world and in human society. As the bearers of children all women are suffering from this fundamental shift in values. As those who grow food and take care of the land, peasant and rural women are doubly discounted and disadvantaged by the policies and social changes based on these neo-liberal values.

These negative changes, coupled with a history of subjugation and voicelessness, often undermine the self-esteem and leadership confidence of rural and peasant women. However, women of the land are key to the building of healthy, sustainable rural communities, caring for the land and achieving genuine, long-term food security. Rural women produce much of the food that feeds fami-

lies and local communities. They are historically and currently responsible for protecting and enhancing the biodiversity which is vital to human survival. They are the beating heart of rural cultures.

Genuine rural development, which includes cultural, social, economic and environmental rejuvenation, depends on rural women consciously and courageously taking a leading role." (*Via Campesina Position Paper on Gender, Bangalore, India, October 2000*)

And taking a leading role is precisely what the women of the Via Campesina are working on. This means being engaged in a constant and uphill struggle because rural women continue to have little access to economic and political power. Since agricultural structures, including peasant organizations, continue to be dominated by men, women are effectively excluded from decision-making and policy development concerning issues that affect their daily lives.

But women of the Via Campesina are not compliant accomplices of economic restructuring, nor are they passive victims in the face of increasing poverty and marginalization. Indeed, women of the Via Campesina are using three traditional weapons of the weak - organization, co-operation and community - to redefine "develop-



photo: Douglas Mansur



ment" and to build an alternative model of agriculture, one that is based on the principles of gender equity, social justice and respect for peasant cultures and peasant economies.

By focusing on the common ground they share as "women of the land" the women of the Vía Campesina are effectively moving from the "politics of exclusion" to the "politics of the possible." Just how are women accomplishing this? In 1996, following the Second International Conference of the Vía Campesina held in Tlaxcala, Mexico the Vía Campesina Women's Commission was formed to accomplish the following:

- ✱ Examine the specific needs, interests and concerns of women of the Vía Campesina,
- ✱ To develop strategies, mechanisms and a plan of action to ensure women's equal participation and representation at all levels of Vía Campesina,
- ✱ To establish lines of coordination and communication among women of the Vía Campesina, and
- ✱ To develop leadership skills among women farm leaders.

Since its formation the Vía Campesina Women's Commission has accomplished a lot. Women held workshops and international exchanges among farm organizations in Thailand, Brazil, Honduras, Canada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and India. These activities enabled women to learn about the agricultural realities in different countries, share information and experiences concerning alternative production and marketing strategies, explore ideas about organizing in the countryside, discuss strategies to address gender inequities and engage in joint actions.

These actions addressed issues of human rights, biodiversity and genetic resources, management of natural resources, agricultural trade and food sovereignty. These workshops were instrumental in enabling women to gain more confidence in themselves as farm leaders.

The women of the Vía Campesina believe that they must work together with their male counterparts on equal terms to build an alternative agricultural model. Hence, women in increasing numbers eagerly joined the Vía Campesina delegations to the World Food Summit (Rome 1996), the WTO Ministerial Meeting (Seattle 1999), and the Conference of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (Dresden 2000). From 1996 to 2000, the National Farmers Union (NFU) was Coordinator of the Women's Commission and its representative, Nettie Wiebe, was the only woman on the International Coordinating Commission of the Vía Campesina (ICC). At the Third International Conference of the Vía Campesina held in Bangalore, India in October 2000, conference delegates unanimously agreed to expand the membership of the ICC to ensure gender parity. In just four short years it is clear that the Vía

Campesina now has a much stronger women's presence and women's voices are being heard.

However, this is not to suggest that there is no more work to do. The Vía Campesina women acknowledge, among other things, the existence of destructive power struggles among women themselves. Women also suffer from a lack of cultural sensitivity and respect for different ways of working. Perhaps most important is the need to transform persistent ideologies and cultural practices in the countryside which perpetuate unequal gender relations.

The transformational potential of the Vía Campesina rests in the fact that as its organizations engage in collective action within their national boundaries, they do so with the knowledge that they are connected to the actions and organizations of men and women half a world away. The solidarity and unity experienced within the Vía Campesina yield perhaps the most precious gift of all, hope. This is clearly captured in the Vía Campesina's slogan "Globalizing the Struggle - Globalizing Hope."

*Annette Desmarais is a member of the National Farmers Union and has spent ten years working for OXFAM-Canada to help the NFU develop links with farm organizations in many parts of the world.*



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working class politics in the 21st century

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*Want to find out more about the CAW Taskforce? Contact your local union or check out [www.caw.ca](http://www.caw.ca) on the Internet and look under Taskforce on Politics.*



# Feminism and Foes

*An examination of the challenges of building a strong women's movement.*

by Anne McGrath



Canadian women are constantly told that we live in the best place in the world. This smug assertion is used, both implicitly and explicitly, to dampen women's demands for changes to unequal and unfair social and economic conditions. There is no question that many women in Canada, the second richest country in the world, have experienced benefits from a global economic system based on exploitation of women's unpaid and underpaid labour and the racism of unjust trade and investment policies. It is also true, however, that the vast majority of Canadian women face discriminatory policies that lower their wages and living standards, keep them tied to men for protection and financial security and punish those who are not attached to men.

Despite relatively standard levels of "formal equality" through laws, rules, regulations and procedures, women in Canada experience an underlay of inequality that places women in jeopardy. Women experience the world in very different ways and the scope and depth of women's poverty is a key indicator highlighting the consequences of womanhood in a society that places women in subordinate roles.

The feminist movement has been a major social force in the world over the past several decades. Feminism has challenged male dominance and established the legitimacy of women's desires for equality, justice and peace. Women's struggles around the world have been a powerful counterpoint to the sexist and racist exploitation of globalized capitalism. Women have organized as workers, as producers, as consumers, as mothers, and as activists to confront injustice and oppression and build alternatives. In country after country, women are actively creating and promoting visions of economic, social and political justice.

The right wing social and economic agenda that has gripped Canada has been responsible for terrible obstacles and setbacks for those working to promote women's rights and the rights of other marginalized people. Women attending international gatherings to organize for gender equality have agreed that the major forces keeping women back are the dominance of the free market system and the rise in conservatism.

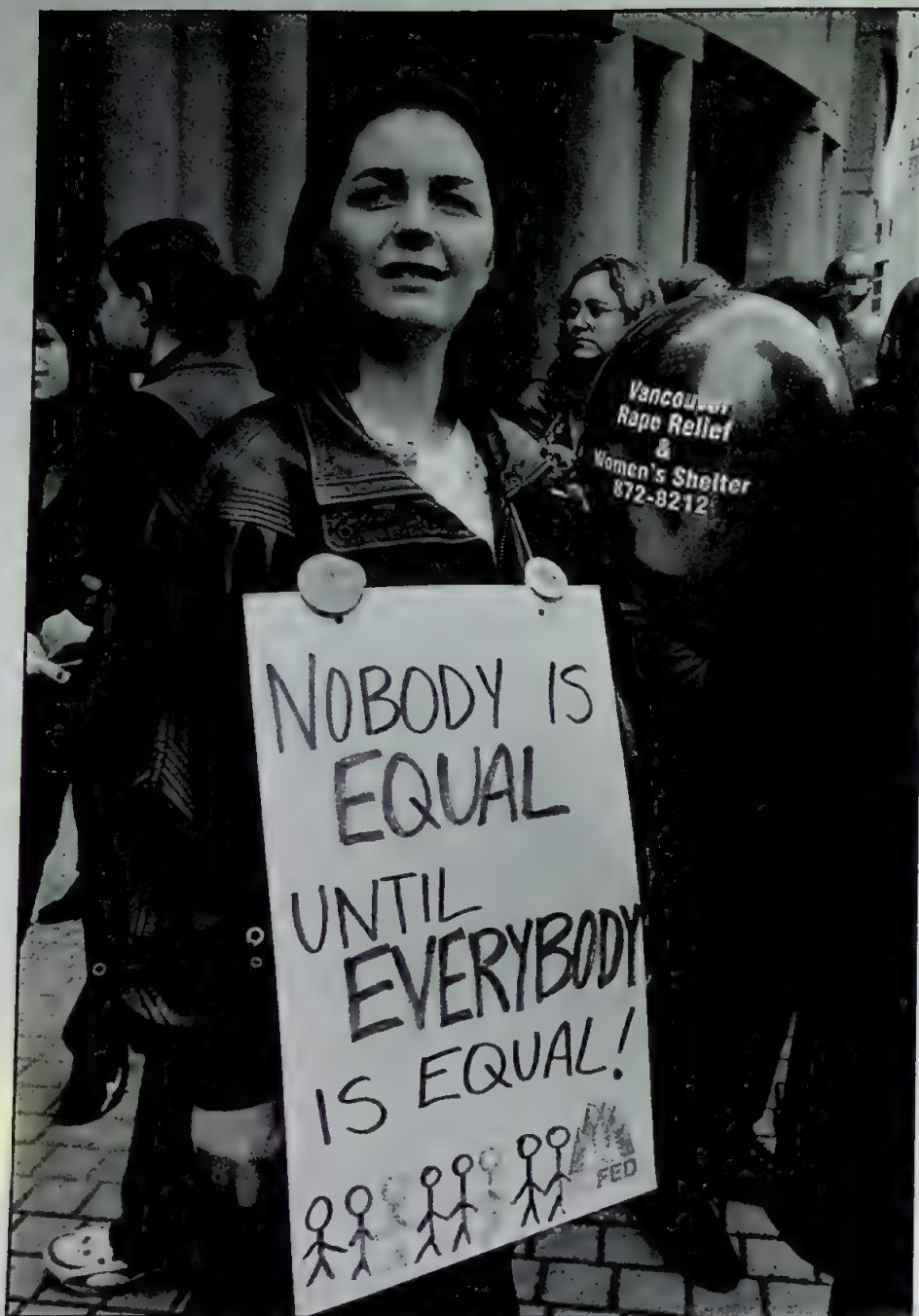
International trade agreements deepening and en-

trenching the dominance of free markets have met with resistance from coalitions of social forces with strong participation from women in organized women's movements and women active in broader social movements. Globally, women's economic security under liberalized trade regimes is deteriorating rapidly. The advent of economic liberalization and the dominance of the market as the key engine of economic growth have been manifested in various programs of fiscal fundamentalism. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in the countries of the South and Free Trade Agreements in the countries of the North restrict women's employment, increase women's unpaid labour, erode and dismantle social programs and entrench the gender division of labour. In a report to the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the United Nations stated that on every continent women work longer hours, earn less money and are more likely to live in poverty than men.

Around the world, right wing social groupings and political parties have organized to press for fiscal and social fundamentalism. In Austria, a coalition government saw, for a brief time, the installation of an avowedly neo-fascist politician as a cabinet minister. Neo-fascist parties in many European countries have been successful in generating hatred toward marginalized communities. In Canada, groups such as the Alberta Federation of Women United for Families and R.E.A.L. Women (Realistic, Equal, Active for Life) have been promoted as legitimate media spokespeople and participants in public policy debates. In the United Nations such groups have been successful at disrupting discussions to advance gender equality. Right wing political parties and social groups empower the proponents of hatred to speak without fear of retribution. They cloak their sexist, racist, homophobic hatred in the guise of "free speech" and accuse their critics of "political correctness."

The death of feminism has been proclaimed with glee over and over again. It would be easy to count dozens of newspaper headlines, magazine stories and political pundit proclamations about the demise or near-death experiences of the feminist movement. The truth is that feminism has a continuing capacity to shock, expose and agitate systems organized on the basis of radical exclusion





*International Women's Day 2000*  
photo: Elaine Brière

based on gender, race and class oppression.

Women's movements operate with the twin tensions of agreement and division. While there are strong and sustainable insights that unite equality seeking women, there are also major differences that require reflection and action. Differences based on race, class, sexual orientation, age and ability have been central to women's organizing efforts in the contemporary context. It is also true that there are women who enjoy the privileges that accrue to them based on their own race and class position. These women are often keen to proclaim the irrelevance and extremism of feminism as barriers to women's unity. In truth, these women are part of the system that operates to exclude

our, aboriginal people, gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgendered people, people with disabilities, and poor people.

The steps to organizing globally have begun and have been building over the past couple of decades and the resistance to globalized capitalism is a force to be reckoned with.

*Anne McGrath is a feminist, an activist, a part-time professor in Communication at the University of Ottawa and a researcher with the Canadian Union of Public Employees.*

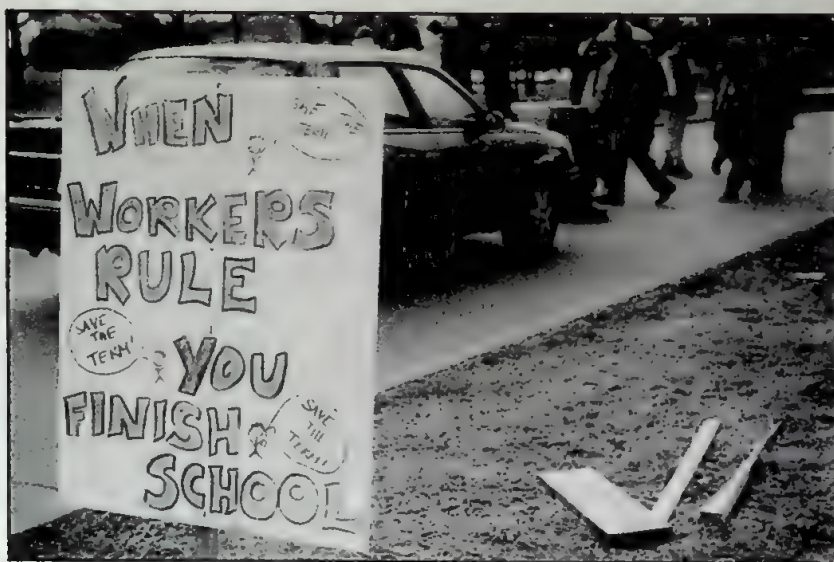
women from meaningful participation in society.

Canadian women face a hostile and intransigent state willing to use the rhetoric of equality to push back women's demands for fairness and accountability. Women's demands for social and economic justice are passé - the fight for equality has been won and the remnants of a dead movement continue to whine about petty and inconsequential grievances. In this context, Canadian feminists must continue to press for change using documented cases of injustice, organizational ingenuity, consistent coalition work, targeted campaigns of resistance and mass mobilization.

The experience of the past decade has been that Canadian governments, federally and provincially, have been prepared to use force to implement measures that promote global corporate interests. The images of police pepper spraying protesters at APEC meetings in Vancouver, excessive police presence (including armed snipers on the tops of buildings) during the World Petroleum Congress meetings in Calgary and the heightened levels of state security assembling in Quebec City for the FTAA Summit attest to the willingness of the state to intervene aggressively to protect globalized capital.

It has been argued that the next wave of feminism must be global. It is imperative that women reach across the many divisions we experience to acknowledge that racism and class oppression are central features of women's oppression. Women's equality can never be realized in a world that accepts and promotes violence and brutality against people of col-





## Strike to Win!

---

*How solidarity helped CUPE Local 3903 push back the corporate giants trying to step on their campus.*

---

by Jeff Shantz & Chris Vance

**O**n January 11 the longest strike by post-secondary education workers in Canadian history came to an end. The outcome of the 78 day strike of Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 3903 at Canada's third largest university differed from many. It ended with a relatively substantial victory for the teaching assistants (TAs), contract faculty and research assistant/graduate assistants (RA/GAs) at York University.

The proposals made by York administration were standards of the corporatization drive in other public service sectors: privatization, reduced job security and reductions in wages and benefits. The political character of the strike and its importance in the battle against neo-liberal marketization of post-secondary education were reflected in the major issues being fought over: tuition indexation and job security and promotion.

In recent years, enormous tuition increases have been encouraged by federal government cuts to education funding and provincial government deregulation of tuition fees for graduate and professional programs. Key for the union in fighting for principles of universality and accessibility was the commitment to secure tuition relief for future as well as current TAs and GA/RAs. Tuition indexation offers protection against the tuition increases which have

eroded the already limited accessibility of post-secondary education in Canada. Current TAs had this protection but the university was seeking to eliminate it for future members through a "grandparent" clause.

For TA locals at other universities in Canada to have any hope of gaining similar protections, Local 3903 had to hold strong on the indexation principle. Losing indexation in the only local to have it would have been a crushing blow for locals with contracts due such as at Carleton (Ottawa) and McMaster (Hamilton).

Another major plank in the corporatization agenda has been movement towards increased reliance on contract faculty. A key part of the agenda is to create "flexible" labour as campuses are made to fit the lean production models of other sectors. Contract faculty at York currently have to apply for their jobs every four to eight months regardless of seniority. Even those who have taught a course for 20 years have to re-apply to teach it, with no guarantee that they will get it. To protect against this, Local 3903 fought for an increase in the number of conversions of contract faculty to tenure stream.

The university's intransigence throughout the strike spoke clearly about the political character of the negotiations. The administration hired a chief negotiator from an



infamous union-busting law firm known for defending the Liberal government (unsuccessfully) against women workers' lawsuit for pay equity.

The York Board of Governors consists primarily of corporate Directors and CEOs. One Governor authored a 1996 report recommending the provincial government deregulate tuition fees - a proposal which has been given life in a Bill currently going through readings in the Ontario legislature. Another is CEO and Chair of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce which administers student loans and profits from the increased student debts related to costly tuition. The University President is the former Vice-President of the Liberal Party of Canada - the very party which set the stage for tuition deregulation by cutting education transfers to the provinces.

The only way that strikers were able to withstand the assaults by strike breakers, theft of fire barrels and safety gates, threats of arrests and a government imposed ratification vote was through militance on the line and tremendous solidarity given by supporters on and off campus. Local 3903 has come a long way in building an activist local, forming flying squads to support other unions and community groups and doing support work for militant organizations like the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP).

During the strike this solidarity was returned tremendously. Auto-workers provided food to picketers nearly every day. Steelworkers and high school teachers showed

up to strengthen the lines. Undergraduate students organized occupations and rallies against the administration. Student groups like the Iranian Students' Association brought snacks and cheerful greetings. University workers showed up from other cities to walk the lines. Day care workers who were enduring a six month strike themselves (now seven and counting) joined the line. OCAP was always ready when threats of police actions were on the lips of administrators. All of these people came out and showed the kind of solidarity that is necessary to win against the corporate forces aligned and determined to further their agenda.

Right from the start Local 3903 took its inspiration from OCAP. Their call to "Fight to Win!" became the union's call to "Strike to Win!" Picketers discussed strategies and tactics on the lines and at open strike committee meetings and ensured the autonomy of pickets and the priority of rank-and-file decision-making on the lines. Gains were made and the corporate agenda was held back. Militance and strength on the line made the difference.

*Jeff Shantz is a rank-and-file member of CUPE Local 3903 and active in the Toronto General Defence Committee which does support work for political and class struggle prisoners.*

*Chris Vance is a member of CUPE Local 3903 and a worker in an anti-corporate communications organization.*

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# When things seem Squirrely...

*An employer hires a security firm who goes looking for squirrels in all the wrong places.*

by Adriane Paavo

It's one of the strangest events in the Grain Services Union's (GSU) history. In late November, GSU discovered that Agricore was spying on Union social events and meetings in Manitoba. GSU Local 2900 held one of its annual meetings in a hotel in Swan River. During the meeting, a hotel staff person came in to say that someone had secretly put a tape recorder behind a room divider to try and record the meeting.

Union staff and members seized the tape recorder. With the help of the hotel staff, they learned that the man who planted it worked for the private security firm B. A. Evans & Associates Inc. of Winnipeg. Further research showed that B. A. Evans had been hired by Agricore to "monitor" GSU activities and meetings in Manitoba.

News of the Swan River incident led GSU members to recall another unusual event. On July 15, during a union picnic in Manitoba's Little Red River park, some members' children spotted a man in camouflage gear hiding in tall grass and holding a video camera. The children ran and told their parents, who confronted the man. He said that he was video-taping squirrels.

Agricore has admitted hiring B.A. Evans & Associates to monitor GSU activities, including the picnic and several Union meetings. While company spokespeople deny authorizing any video- or audio-taping, GSU can confirm that at least one senior Agricore representative viewed the picnic videotape. Brian Evans (of the security firm) has issued a statement apologizing for the Swan River incident and stating that the man who planted the recording device exceeded his authority. Agricore, on the other hand, has not formally apologized and has even gone to some lengths to justify its actions.

In late 1999, GSU members who work for Agricore in Alberta and Manitoba went on strike for five weeks. During the strike, the grain company hired several secu-

rity agencies to "monitor" picket lines, strikers, and company property. By July 2000, the strike had been over for six months.

Media interest in the spy story has been high, including from BBC Radio in London. GSU has filed an unfair labour practice complaint with the Canada Industrial Relations Board and is suing Agricore Co-operative Limited and its security firm for breach of privacy and defamation. The Union is asking for an injunction to stop further violation of the Union's and individual GSU members' privacy. GSU is also asking for legal costs and general and punitive damages.

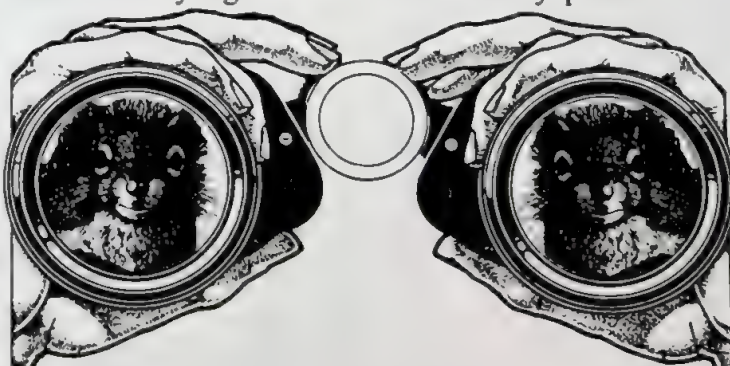
"The key question is: why would Agricore hire someone to monitor GSU activities?" said GSU General Secretary Hugh Wagner. "We assume that employers listen to the grapevine to keep abreast of union plans. But this kind of thing sours union-management relations at a time when mistrust is at an all-

time high. It is the right of working people to join and take part in the lawful activities of a union," Wagner pointed out.

"It is the right of union members to meet and socialize without worrying if the boss is watching. If corporations use their resources to secretly monitor citizens, how safe are our democratic rights? It is time to return to respect for the right of every person to act in defence of their own and their communities' interests," Wagner added.

"Democratic and human rights are for all people, not just for those with money and power. The next time an employer wants to know what goes on at a Union function, they can ask. And, if they are told to mind their own business, they will have to accept the answer," he concluded.

*Adriane Paavo is a staff representative with Grain Services Union.*





# **TAX TRUTH #6**

---

**Every ill the economy has suffered over the past two decades has been attributed by neoconservatives to high tax rates on rich individuals...**

**Although,  
it seems to be almost an article of faith among the  
converted that high taxes have significant adverse  
effects on economic growth,**

**the proposition is not obvious in theory,  
nor  
is it supported by the weight of empirical evidence.**

**Neil Brooks  
Professor of tax law,  
Osgoode Hall, Toronto**



**national  
union**

Created by the National Union of Public and General Employees-[www.nupge.ca](http://www.nupge.ca)-for other tax truths.



# Swing Set

Ani DiFranco

Righteous Babe Records, 2000.

Box 95, Ellicott Station

Buffalo, N.Y. 14205

by Laurie Hergott

Ani DiFranco is well-known for relentlessly making music. Whether writing new songs, remixing or doing covers she demonstrates that music is a process not a product. Her innovative musical talent, her incredible lyrics and her unique guitar-playing style continue to reach out to fans even after producing over 15 albums in ten years on her own independent label, Righteous Babe Records, that she started when she was 19.

What I enjoy about DiFranco is that she has no qualms addressing social and sexual politics, nor has she let over-protective fans hold her back from living her own musical evolution. Her music has provided an inspirational voice for the thousands who identify with her expression of life's experiences. The strength of her music is often found in the weaknesses and harsh realities they expose.

In *Swing Set* DiFranco offers us three of her own songs re-mixed and then, as a nice surprise, three cover tracks. Fittingly, these three tracks (Woodie Guthrie, Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs) chronicle the battle against inequality over three decades. It seems

very appropriate that a contemporary songwriter such as DiFranco is performing tracks from three of her predecessors in the tradition of political protest through music. The issues they wrote about may have changed slightly, but they still hold true and an audience awaits in today's generation.

I must say, one of my favorite



things about DiFranco is her ability and insight to produce music in a manner that my generation will embrace, from musicians most of us have heard of but never fully appreciated. She is a bridge of sorts - able to link generations over a stream of political themes.

These songs are more than just covers. They have roots in different side projects DiFranco has been working on. In fact, *Do Re Me* is DiFranco's interpretation of the Woodie Guthrie tribute album, *Til We Outnumber 'Em* composed of various artists and released by Righteous Babe Records.

To sum it up, *Swing Set* is six glimpses of a musician in her off hours, looking to the past and making its poetry swing.

# Fourteen Days

Laura Love

Zoë Records, 2000.

One Camp Street

Cambridge, M.A. 02140

by Loretta Gerlach

Laura Love is one of the most innovative female artists on the folk scene today. Her unique blend of African-American, Celtic, Bluegrass and other influences, combined with her powerful yet beautiful voice has made Love a mainstay in some of the hottest music scenes in North America. Love once described her music as "Afro-Celtic" and in her latest album she shows just how well that combination works.

This is Love's seventh solo album and contains a number of great tunes. *In Seattle* was inspired by her participation in the November 1999 protests against the World Trade Organization. She describes the experience in the CD liner; "I loved being a part of the protests because I felt buoyant and hopeful in a way that I haven't for some little while. It felt like the beginning of real change where we truly start to question where things come from, how people are treated and what we're doing to the planet when we consume as if there is no tomorrow."

Other great songs on the album include a cover of '60s star Laura Nyro's *Stoned Soul Picnic*, the excellent original *Sometimes Davy Wins* and the funky mariachi-style *Sativa*. Love's songs are an amazing collage of breathtaking music, thoughtful and compassionate lyrics and a little wicked wit. In *I am Going to Miss You*, Love sings, "Ask me if I'll miss you, and I'll say does Rose Kennedy own a black dress."

If you are looking for an album that you can dance to, laugh to, cry to and maybe even plan a protest to, *Fourteen Days* in the one for you!



**You Were Here**  
**Sarah Harmer**  
 Cold Snap Music, 2000.

by Michelle Beveridge

Sarah Harmer's star is quickly rising. The past lead singer for Weeping Tile, she is another example of Canada's incredible female musicians. Harmer has a polished folksy sound, combining poignant melodies with thoughtful and poetic song-writing. She has a sweet voice with a slight crystal-like sharpness that gives the music a good edginess. Echoes of Joni Mitchell and Lucinda Williams ring throughout the album, especially in the softer slower ballads. *Open Window* is one of those rare songs that from the first moment, at the risk of being over-dramatic, makes your heart catch. "Love, I see you there, Adrift on the air, Floating by the open window..."

It's Harmer's excellent sense of timing and intensity - pausing, lingering, drawing out and drifting away - that builds the simplicity of the lyrics into a beautifully layered song.

Her more upbeat songs, like *Basement Apartment*, also display these qualities, making the album a treasure.

**Tune-Up**  
**Kinnie Starr**  
 Violet Inch Records, 2000.  
[www.kinniestarr.com](http://www.kinniestarr.com)

by Laurie Hergott

The music of Kinnie Starr, in her own words, is "sweet like vine-ripened tomatoes smashed against an old brick wall. It is called 'Chunk-hop' - a collision of lurching hip-hop beats, word-play and simple heavy dissonant guitar grooves." Starr, hailing from Vancouver, is famous for her energetic and innovative live shows which range from spoken word to a full band rock show. She rejects the idea that art is a passive experience and will perform her material offstage in the middle of the crowd, unmiked if need be.

After falling through the cracks of the merging of her label with another major label and being encouraged to change her music, Starr has finally received her hard-won inde-

pendence and has released *Tune-Up* on her very own label, Violet Inch Records.

For those who have never heard Starr, her music blends the borders between hip-hop, blues, punk and folk with lyrics in Spanish, French and English. Her spoken word additions accent the work even more. Through her engagement in the various influences, she has managed to make these borders fluid. As she, herself, states "I am interested in erasing lines - lines that separate people. I believe in treating people fairly while trying to erase my own misconceptions - lines in the mind - or preconceptions of any situation."

I'm constantly searching for musicians committed to giving social and political commentary through their music and Starr's lyrics and poetry are personal and reflect her beliefs. She's no angry young woman looking for a place to yell. She has valuable messages to share with us and this is her forum.

Described as "ambient dub hip-hop with a feminist half-breed bent," *Tune-Up* is a full and wonderful album. Starr's songs are both energizing and inspiring. She is an independent and progressive multi-talented artist that deserves to be supported.

Not only does she write, arrange and produce all tracks on this album herself, but she is also a visual artist, activist and is writing her first book. Her liner notes even include contacts to activist organizations and other projects to check out.

And if you don't already own her '96 album *Tidy*, you're missing out! Albums, records or stickers can all be ordered from [www.kinniestarr.com](http://www.kinniestarr.com).

(Don't forget to wait for the hidden tracks. They are gems.)





**Whose National Security?:  
Canadian State Surveillance and the  
Creation of Enemies.**

edited by Gary Kinsman, Dieter K. Buse and Mercedes Steedman  
Between the Lines, 2000.  
720 Bathurst Street, Suite #404  
Toronto ON M5S 2R4  
\$29.95.

reviewed by George Manz

By the mid-1920s, the RCMP's files on leftists consisted of millions of pages of material. By the end of World War II, over two million Canadians had been investigated.

If you think this is fiction, then you need to read this book. And if you do believe it, you need the information in *Whose National Security?* so you can pull back the veil of secrecy and fight back.

This book is largely the product of a conference on Canadian national security. The preface says the conference included academics, trade unionists and activists "who had been on the

receiving end of Canada's national security campaigns."

But this book isn't an academic treatise on the Canadian intelligence network's spying on Canadians. It's a weapon we can use against those who want to undermine democracy by thwarting lawful dissent.

This book covers a great deal of territory: from Canadian spymasters and their spies to the people and organizations they spied on. Some of the most interesting examples involved Mounties spying on Communists, various leftists, and trade unionists.

For example, John Leopold began working undercover for the Mounties in 1918. After he completed basic training, he took the name Jack Esselwein and joined the Socialist Party of Canada and later the Communist Party. By December 1921, Leopold had risen to secretary of the Workers Party of Canada and later secretary of the Regina local of the International Brotherhood of Painters. By 1925 Leopold was elected president of the Regina Trades and Labour Council. He even helped elect a Communist as an alderman. But his cover was finally blown in 1928 and the Communist Party expelled him.

Although Communists

and other leftists seemed to be the main targets of the RCMP Security Service and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), there were many oth-

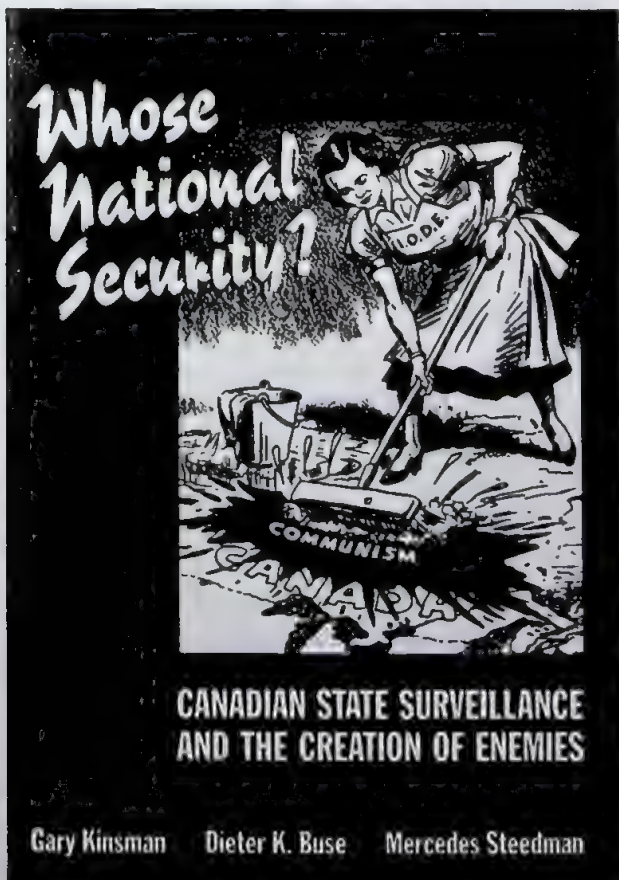
## During the 1950s and 1960s they were even attending Tupperware parties!

ers as well. These included immigrants, Catholics, the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers union in Sudbury, the Housewives Consumers' Association, students and faculty at the University of Saskatchewan and University of Regina, high school students, aboriginal people, gays and lesbians, Quebec separatists, postal workers, Arabs during the Gulf War, and student activists demonstrating against APEC in Vancouver.

During the 1950s and 1960s the Mounties were even attending Tupperware parties! In September 1963 Constable J. Wiebe reported that the Sudbury Ladies' Auxiliary was engaged in the suspicious act of raising funds for such groups as the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, the Children's Aid Society and the Cancer Society.

The revolution must be just around the corner judging by the large number of people that the powers-that-be seem to think are subversives. So don't be afraid. You're not alone.

*George Manz has had a life-long fascination with left-wing journalism, coins, espionage and the Saskatchewan Roughriders.*





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## AND THE GUYS SAID "SO PROVE IT!"

"Nothing proves adultery for a woman more than pregnancy."

- Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, referring to the Islamic legal code, or sharia, of the northern state of Zamfara that brought the punishment of 100 lashes of the cane to Bariya Ibrahim Magazu for pregnancy out of wedlock. An additional sentence of 80 lashes "for falsely accusing three men of adultery" was dropped but the men have gone unpunished.

# Say What??



## FRIEND OF THE WORKING CLASS

"She's got a unique background. She is plenty capable and she is smart."

- George W. Bush, in support of Linda Chavez, his choice for labour secretary. Her unique background includes providing an illegal immigrant with shelter and "pocket money" in exchange for doing household chores. The FBI is investigating the possibility that this might be considered employment, which is illegal. Chavez is also opposed to affirmative action, a minimum wage, bilingual education and sexual harassment suits. Organized labour consider her nomination "an insult to working men and women." Blacks and feminists are not exactly pleased either.

## LAWYERS FOLLOW THE LEADER

"I'm not going to fake crocodile tears for you. I've said I'm broken-hearted about this."

- Stockwell Day, expressing his regrets to reporters about the tab of \$792,000 he's letting Alberta tax-payers pick up under the government's Risk Management Fund. The insurance is intended to protect MLAs "acting within the scope of their duties" by paying legal costs and settlements up to \$1-million. Day, who was Alberta treasurer at the time, wrote a letter to the editor of the Red Deer Advocate criticizing Lorne Goddard, a lawyer representing a client in possession of child pornography. Critics have raised concerns that the loose interpretation of the criteria for use of the fund may embolden MLAs to engage in slanderous personal attacks without the normal hesitation that comes with facing potential consequences.

## ONE MORE CHANCE

"We're pleased that the criminal justice system has recognized that this kind of persistent financial predator is in the same league as someone who does serious bodily harm."

- Steve Wilson, head of the British Columbia Securities Commission on the four-year jail term handed to Lee Mitton by the B.C. Supreme Court for his 104th fraud conviction. This time it was a \$2.4-million stock scam he ran against investment dealers in B.C. but he is also currently wanted in the United States for an \$11-million investment scam.

Seems the guys in suits have to really work hard at proving themselves to be criminals.





# The Greatest Threat Against Women Yet

by Cara Banks & Loretta Gerlach



**Y**ou hear it all the time - you've come a long way, baby. We've got it all now, right? The vote, human rights legislation against discrimination and harassment, jobs outside the home, movements towards pay equity - it all sounds good, right? Well, even if it is true that women are making strides in equality, the greatest threat of all is facing women - corporate globalization.

The globalization of corporate rule is proceeding at a mad pace. Multi-national Corporations (MNC's), mostly based in the United States but with some in Canada, are exploding in terms of growth, profit and power. Wal-Mart's economy is bigger than 161 countries. General Motors is bigger than Denmark. Ford is bigger than South Africa. The top 200 corporations in the world have almost twice the economic influence as the poorest four-fifths of humanity!

One of the major factors behind the tremendous growth of MNC's is the promotion of free trade. Take the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Canada and the United States and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, the United States and Mexico. These deals allow corporations to expand their activities with little restriction. And in an effort to be attractive to these corporations, our governments embrace privatization, lower labour standards, and weaken the social safety net. Citizens bear the brunt of these business-friendly policies and the increase in union-busting, top-heavy employers.

Since we have signed the FTA and the NAFTA the vast majority of Canadians have seen a deterioration of

income and a rise in precarious employment: part-time, temporary, contract and self-employment.

Regardless of these facts, the Canadian government continues to pursue the expansion of free trade at a dizzying speed. Currently, negotiations are underway with 34 countries in the Americas to develop the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), a hemispheric expansion of NAFTA. Sometimes referred to as "NAFTA on steroids," this agreement would expand free trade into the fastest growing area of the economy - the service sector. The service sector includes everything from health care, education and social services to regulation of professional bodies, real estate services and banking.

At the same time, the Canadian government as a member of the World Trade Organization is also negotiating the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). The GATS also expands free trade into the area of public and private services. As corporations deplete natural resources around the world, they are now looking to profit off service delivery rather than just goods production.

Finally, the provincial and federal governments are also looking to expand upon the existing Agreement on Interprovincial Trade (AIT) to promote freer trade amongst the provinces. The idea is that the less trade barriers there are between provinces, the more attractive Canada will be to corporations and to free trade partners.

All this expansion of free trade will mean further deterioration of labour standards and other public services. Women's lives will be deeply af-

fected because women are more likely to be employees in the service sector. Women in these fields will be faced with more privatization, lower labour standards, threats to seniority provisions and other economic hardships. Women in already oppressive situations (who face racism, violence, and other barriers to earning a livelihood), will find themselves pushed farther out to the margins as their more privileged sisters fight over the few remaining decent jobs.

As governments privatize or underfund public services, including healthcare and social services, families are left to pick up the pieces. And guess which family members already do the bulk of caregiving work? We may have come a long way, but any meaningful progress made by women will be frozen in its tracks as long as corporations are more powerful than governments and can grow unchecked.

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*My Opinion does not necessarily represent the editorial views of Briarpatch. We welcome submissions and encourage any ensuing dialogue.*





# Work around the clock?

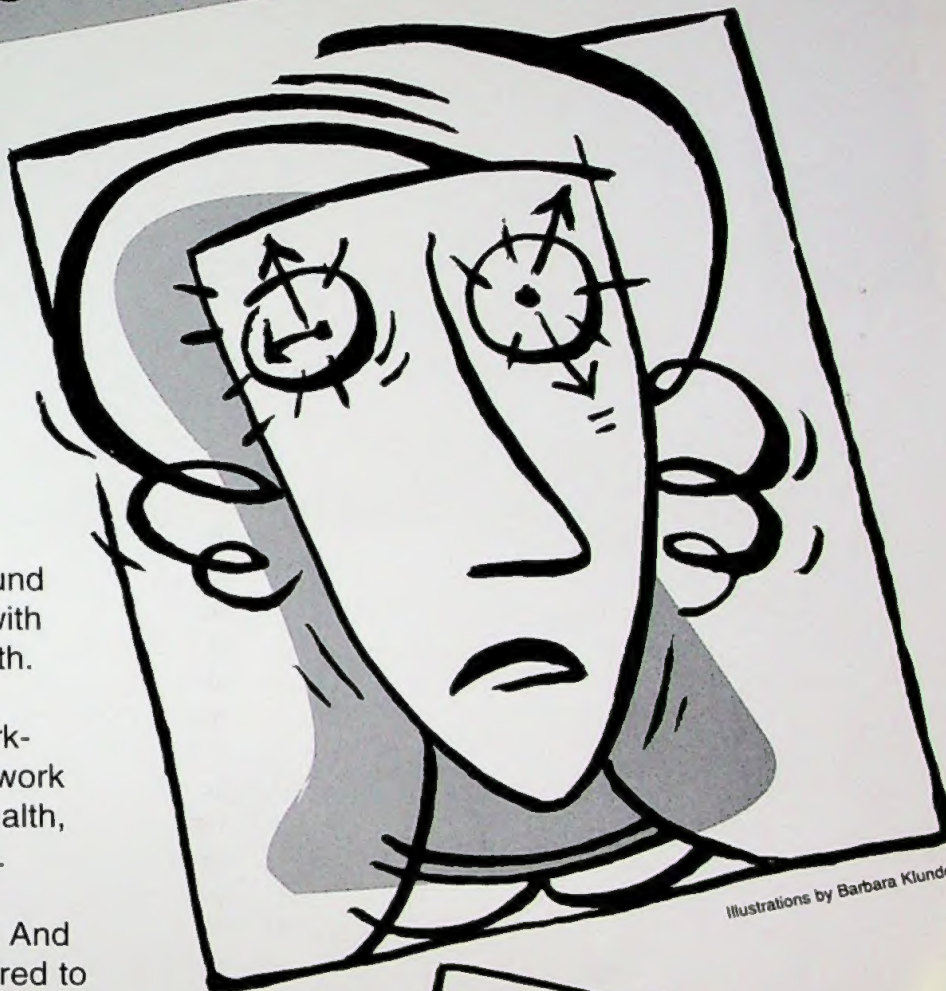
## No way!

"Rock around the clock," sang Bill Haley and the Comets back in the 1950s. Today it's 'work around the clock' and workers pay for it with injuries, broken homes, even death.

Now, the demand to increase workloads – to make us speed up, to work more overtime – threatens our health, our families and our communities.

Take your breaks. Leave on time. And demand that more workers are hired to keep your workload manageable and public services efficient.

**It took a long time  
for trade unions  
to win the weekend –  
and we'll fight to keep it!**



Illustrations by Barbara Klunder



Canadian Union of Public Employees

[cupe.ca](http://cupe.ca)





The emancipation of women may have begun not with the vote, nor in the cities where women marched and carried signs and protested, but rather when they mounted a good cowhorse and realized how different and fine the view.

**From the back of a horse, the world looked wider.**

Quote: Joyce Gibson Roach

Photo courtesy Pendleton Cowgirl Company, Inc.

See available prints at [www.cowgirlcompany.com](http://www.cowgirlcompany.com)



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